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Keigo YOSHIDA

The object of this paper is to discuss the socio-cultural factors of Japanese society and their effects on the psychological development of Japanese children and parent-child relationships around the pivot of children's psychological problems in Japan.

1) The socio-cultural factors of Japanese society

At first I must discuss the socio-cultural factors of Japanese society operating powerfully. Maybe my discussions will emphasize the negative aspects of Japanese socio-cultural factors because it is difficult to discuss positive aspects of the factors by the person inside the society. Persons inside the culture can not easily be able to be aware of the socio-cultural factors. Please put in mind that there are many positive aspects in Japanese culture which I can not discuss in this paper.

In Japan, to enter universities of highest level is said to be the best and almost only way of succeeding socially. Because many of Japanese enterprises and companies recruited their new employees from such universities through the senior members graduated from these universities and rationing of the numbers of new employees for each university is, in many cases, fixed beforehand in each companies. During about ten years, such "entrance-exam war" tendency becomes increased and the age to begin the preparation for the exam becomes lower and lower. Recently, most popular preschool kindergartens are the ones which teach foreign language, that means English, and letters, Kanji or Hiragana and even
Average elementary school children in the city area go to after-school or cramming schools three or four days and one or two another schools such as swimming or piano or drawing. According to the research of the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, the ratio of pupils who go to cramming schools is increasing (FIG. 1). Many of them get home by about no early than nine o’clock, and after coming home, homeworks and preparations for lessons of elementary school are waiting for them. Recent medical research shows that some elementary school children or junior high school boys or girls are suffering from adult diseases such as gastric (stomach) ulcer or high blood pressure or diabetes, which means they are so much busy like adults and feel so much stress to become adult diseases. Compared to other countries, total time of children’s playing is very short in Japan according to the research of the General Affairs Agency (FIG. 2).

In such a context, psychological problems of school refusal in the elementary schools and junior high schools are becoming severe in Japan (Research of the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture) (FIG. 3, 4). For instance, there is about one school refusal student and one or two students with its tendency in one class (about 40 students) in junior high school in the city area. In the national average, about 4% of junior high school students are school refusal. And most of students who has not school refusal tendency feels also that school is not fun. According to the research of the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, many children dissatisfy of the contents and ways of school lessons and school grades or results of exams (FIG. 5, 6).

To think of the parent’s situation, problems of the “absent fathers” is still existing in Japan. In a period of a high degree economic growth in Japan, problems of “absent fathers” were problems of fathers who posted jobs in another city, leaving their families behind in their hometown. Or, many fathers worked

**FIG.3 Number of elementary school children with school refus**

**FIG.4 Number of jr. high school students with school refus**

from 8 o'clock to midnight, not only weekdays but also Sunday which is used for reception of his company or customer's companies, something like playing golf. Many children had been brought up without father, so that mother had took care of children alone.

Now, after the bubble economy in Japan had collapsed about five years ago, there are little overtime work for the businessmen. Ironically, fathers in Japan lose their overtime works and also overtime pays
and having no money for drinking at the favorite bars or snacks, they get home early and get the time to share with his wife and children. One of the famous Japanese series of books called "A brief message from the heart (日本一短い母への手紙)" adopted the topic of father and I will introduce one message from it. A girl aged seventeen writes to his father that 'No overtime works when a depression comes. But it's good of seeing father when coming home from school! (不景気の残業なし。帰ってきてお父さんいるのってイイ感じ。) You can understand a daughter's loneliness without father before "a depression comes." Of course there is a negative side of economical depression.

In such a situation of economical deflation like current Japan, a number of the unemployed increases and the economical problems in the family produce other problems like marital quarrels between husband and wife, a change for the worse of a mood in the family, etc.

In Japan, most of fathers (husbands) thinks that 'a child care or nursing is a mother's (wife's) job.' So if his wife asks him of the problems of their children for advice, he usually answers 'a child care or nursing is your job. I'm tired of works. Don't bother me!' But it sound like inconsistent, because in the work place he usually says to his colleagues, 'I am like a cushion put under my wife's hips (buttocks) (「女房の尻に敷かれる」) which means "My wife dominates me!" As he has to obey the rules of wife and children, he asserts that his role is to work and earn the money and refuses to be involved with the family matter. Clinical researches show that some fathers have "phobia for getting home (帰宅恐怖症)" and many fathers killing time in a pub near the house or in the car for one or two hours or in severe cases they sleeps in the car through night. In Japan, the hostess of a bar is usually called by businessmen 'Mom (ママ)! They consult her of their troubles and worries, is take care of after getting drunk. In other words, they depends on her as if she is their mother.

Japanese famous sociologist, Nakane, advocate that Japanese society is the vertical society compared to the Western countries being the horizontal society. In the horizontal society, the horizontal ways of interrelatings of persons are predominant, whereas in the vertical society, vertical ways of interrelatings of persons are predominant. In Japan, for example, businessmen belong to his company and they would not associate with people in other companies even if the job is the same. Japanese company demands the members "selfless devotion to the company" and in the company there are no privacies and businessmen have to express themselves frankly to the colleagues and their bosses. Their company is the "mi-uchi (身内)" which means "persons inside the intimate group" and other people is "yoso-mono (よそ者)" which means "persons outside the intimate group" and they are not said to be associated with in more friendly way than necessary.

You will often hear a critics of Japanese people that they are unfriendly or they don't express their feeling or thinking, they don't have facial expressions, Japanese people cluster together and don't open up to native people. These critics is one way true and due to the fact that Japanese people live on the basis of the vertical society and that for them, every one outside the intimate group is taken as "yoso-mono" and
they cannot associate with anyone outside the group more than necessary. So if you may have the experience of associating with Japanese people frankly, you have taken as “mi-uchi” to them. The good point of vertical society is that for “mi-uchi,” people behave with warmth and friendliness. If “mi-uchi” has a trouble, people selflessly help him and take care of him at any cost. But for “yoso-mono,” people keep him at a distance and never confide the very real feelings and thoughts, which is called “hon-ne (本音)” as compared to social presentations of the official feelings and thoughts, which is called “tate-mae (建て前)” This is difficult to say but almost every Japanese accepts each other to speak from “tate-mae” in public places even if they are “mi-uchi” (intimate relationships) each other and maybe this is the interrelational way much different from American way where everyone expects that even in social public situations people express their feelings and thoughts frankly. As almost every husband says “I am like a cushion put under my wife’s hips (buttocks),” this statement is for many husbands “tate-mae,” and these husbands often dominates their wives in their houses. Maybe it is completely difficult to understand “hon-ne” and “tate-mae” for American people.

Anyway, because Japanese fathers live on the basis of the vertical society, average fathers work selflessly for the company and give all his time and life to the company. So they have no privacy and they don’t use much energy for their family and don’t pay so much attention to their children. Recent young Japanese don’t have such characteristics too much, but still most companies demands businessmen to selflessly devote to the company.

So mothers try to care their children alone even if they have themselves have jobs in Japan. And if any problems appear to their children, they feel much guilty feelings that if they had not have jobs they could care children more and problems would be avoided. In Japan, responsibility of nursing children is said to be, if not all, resting with their mother, therefore she is likely to blame herself for not being able to bring up children well. As the average number of children decreases (the research of the Ministry of Health and Welfare) (FIG.7), mothers try to bring up one or two children with much anxiety and stresses. As a result, children support their mother and themselves live under the stress in the house which makes them problematic at home or at school.

The problem of divorces of marital couples rapidly increases during several years in Japan, too. I hear that in your country, about 5 marital couples per one thousand population divorce in a year. In Japan,
The effect of the socio-cultural factors of Japanese society on the psychological problems of Japanese children and the parent-child relationships about 1.7 marital couples per one thousand population divorce (from the Dynamic Trends in Population Statistics [人口動態統計]) (FIG. 8). Since marital couples in a year is different (Japan: 6.3; USA: 10.5), you can not compare directly, but you can see the problem of divorces in Japan deteriorating.

(2) The psychological development of children in relation to their parents around the pivot of children's psychological problems in Japan

Thus far, I have discussed a socio-cultural factors of Japanese culture. Based on these and further discussions, I will go on to the psychological development of children in relation to their parents around the pivot of children's psychological problems in Japan.

In Japan, when a couple married, social pressures of compelling them to have children as fast as they can is very strong. Parents of both spouses and their relatives almost always say every time they meet with them, 'How about a baby?'

Over the situations where parents take care of their children, there are number of current problems in Japanese modern society.

First of all, there is a problem of nuclear families especially in big cities. Together with 'moving,' mothers confront with the problem of 'park debut (公園デビュー)' that is to say "debut in mother's society at the nearest park." Mothers nursing children make society at the nearest park where they let children play in a daytime. They make an intimate group so that they inform each other of any kind of things including good doctor, good shopping center or nice playing spot. Not only that, they consult each other and advice each other to make a good supportive group to get over the sufferings of child rearing. But after moving to the region and for the first time to go to that park, if a mother fails to get along with the members of the group, she will be excluded from the group and left out of the group and ignored by the members. If such failure is happened, the mother shuts herself up in the house and gradually becomes lonely, depressive, irritated person, who in turn takes a bitter attitude towards her children and vicious cycle begins to work.

In my opinion, mother's social support system consists of father's help and understanding of mother's position and anxiety, grandmother of the mother to support psychologically and physically, horizontal support of mothers who give informations to relief the mother and listening to the mother's concerns, and public institutions like counselling center to support the mother.

In a child-care consultation, I met a mother who was terribly annoyed by her female child aged three who was very nervous and didn't obey her mother. The child had frequent urination and especially at almost every night, she woke up about four times. When she woke up, she always woke mother up and demanded of her to hold the child to the toilet, demanded of her to take off child's underpants, demanded of her to watch the child with the door open and after the pee, demanded of her to put on child's underpants, demanded of her to hold the child to walk back to the bed and demanded of her to sing lullabies until the child fell down to sleep. Once the mother didn't obey the child's commands, she continued to cry, yell and scream for about half an hour! The mother was utterly exhausted by these and came to the consultation.

The child also came to the consultation room. At first she looked around and walked slowly around the consulting room but as soon as she got used to the place, she began to run. Suddenly she stopped and took books from the bookshelf and began to drop them one by one. Her mother firstly endured the situation but when her child begun to drop the books she got angry and scolded the child loudly. For a
moment she stood paralyzed but next time she step up onto the table between mother and me, and begun to run around on the table. I took her behavior for the message to me of defiance. I handed over a drawing paper and crayons and said ‘Draw anything you like!’ She scribbled with strong pressure and painted all the paper in an instant. As I handed over papers one by one and she scribbled them one by one, when about seventh paper was handed, she calmed down and begun to draw something like circles or human figures.

At that time, as I realized that the child’s emotional problems were not so severe and maybe mother was exhausted to the situation, I asked her mother what social support she had of child care.

When she asked her husband of the problems for advice, he answered ‘Child care is your job. I’m tired of works. Don’t bother me!’

As for the grandmother of her own, she couldn’t depend on her because they had been hostile to each other since the mother’s marriage for she forced to marry her husband although the grandmother strongly opposed to it.

Regarding horizontal support of mothers, she failed to carry out the “park debut” and for a short while, she took her child to a park to which it took about 15 minutes to reach but soon she and the child shut themselves up in the house.

Thus she lost all supports necessary for caring her child cheerfully and she and her child lost themselves in the vicious cycle of giving stresses each other incessantly.

In addition to the problem of “tendency toward too much disobedience (過度の反抗傾向),” the problems of “tendency toward too much obedience (過度の従順傾向)” is becoming a serious psychological issue in Japan. There are many children who hardly disobey their parents, adults or peers and cannot express their feeling freely and assert their ideas clearly to anyone and that makes them not feeling full of life. Recently this problem is frequently called the problem of “good child.”

When I was working as psychologist in the mother child playing room, I met a four year girl. At first, she looked happily and cheerfully so staffs thought she had no psychological problem. But gradually some worries began to catch our attention. Ordinary 4 year old children kept his favorite toys and they defended them against other children. But she moved from one toy to another and we couldn’t decide which toy was her favorite. One day, she hid under the trampoline at the corner of the room and didn’t come out. Since then, this problematic behavior continued. I asked her mother of the child. Mother answered that she was a “good child (よい子),” didn’t need a lot of looking after and was reasonable, clever and not naughty child. She had a little aged 8 months but not only she didn’t bully her but she looked after her taking her mother’s place. To hear the answer, I inferred that the child had a “tendency toward too much obedience” and she couldn’t express her desires or emotions. After for a while, she become regressed to a baby. She spoke like a baby (babble), let her mother feed her, let mother put herself a diaper. One or two months later, she at last fiercely expressed her desire which was to take mother with her to the park and play together. Because she was a “good child,” she had never claimed mother to play together.

(3) Problem of school refusal in Japan

Mentioned above, there is a severe problem of school refusal in Japan. It begins from kindergarten children to senior high school students.

I think there are about five types of school refusal.

First one is called separation anxiety type. Clients of this type are relatively few. Their mother has some kind of depression and separation anxiety for them and unconsciously feels very lonely to have them go to school leaving her alone. So they feel her anxiety and loneliness and themselves begin to have separation anxiety and begin to retreat from the school. Children of this type can not go out from the house to play with friends. This type is rather frequent in the kindergartens and lower grades of elementary school.

Second one is called somatization type. Clients of this type feel they want to go to school but when the time to go out is drawing near, they suffer headaches, stomachaches, slight fevers, nausea or vomittings of unknown origin which last till about noon and can not go to the school. This type is rather frequent in the lower grades to higher grades of elementary school but recently, there is a somatization tendency to clients of other types of school refusal.

Third one is called obsessive-compulsive type. Clients of this type have relatively high levels of demands on themselves and like burn-out syndromes, once they feel they failed, they think they can not recover and begin to retreat from school. As many children of this type is apparently good school grades and show themselves cheerfully to teachers, teachers used to assess them as having no problem and this creates the most difficult problem for them. These children try to read in adults' face what is expected of them to do for the favor (benefit) of these adults, parents or teachers. This type is rather frequent in the higher grades of elementary school and junior high school. Often the "tendency toward too much obedience" leads to this type of school refusal.

Forth one is called seclusion or adolescent type. Clients of this type becoming school refusal on the surface and in the hidden meaning, they are experiencing a crisis of adolescence. This type is rather freque-
ent in the junior high school and senior high school. They not only retreat from school but also retreat from everyone or everything. They confined themselves in the house or, in severe cases, in their room and seldom go out from the house or the room. One reason for their self-confinement is that they have strong self-consciousness and they fear that everyone in the district knows of their problem and looks down on them and laughs at them. They seldom talk to their parents and teachers and even friends except one or two intimate friends. They often put a board or spread a piece of paper on which the caution of no-admittance or keep-off is written down.

Fifth one is called family problem type. Families of clients of this type confront with the critical turning point such as marital problems like big quarrels, separations and divorces or economical problems like fathers quitting company job to set up on their own or personal problems that anyone who is very important to the family dies.

Teachers are deeply worried about the school refusal children but it is difficult to cope with the problem since they are busy for other school jobs also and they can not give their whole time to these children. The ministry of education, science and culture decided to dispatch school counselors to the schools to come to grips with school refusal children and their parents. But at present, number of school counselors are not enough for the situation and that is only a drop in the bucket. And also when the school counselor go into the school, problems of vertical society interfere with the linking that teachers keep in close contact with the counselor. Sometimes the counselor is regarded as the "yoso-mono(person outside the group)" and refused to work with by the teachers. After counselor and teachers share several parties and spend nights drinking and talking with "hon-ne(real feelings and thinkings)," teachers admit the counselor as “mi-uchi(person inside the group)” and keep in close contact with the counselor.
(4) Harmonious way of living in Japan and Westernization

I go back to the psychological development of children.

Because of the mother's devoted caring of baby, baby's handling of toys is slightly different between Japan and Western countries. According to the researches of transitional objects which mean children's attachment to Teddy Bears or soft toys or hard toys that relates to the psychological development of children, in Western countries more than about 50% of children have transitional objects whereas in Japan less than 20% of children use toys for transitional objects. But recent research showed that in Japan ears or jaw or elbows or neck's skin or even moles at the neck of children's mother was used for soothe when they fell to sleep and if we counted these objects as transitional objects, difference of the percents between Japan and Western countries vanished. This means that Japanese babies use parts of their mother's body for relaxing. Reason for this is maybe that in Japan family sleeps at night in one room for quite a long time compared to the Western countries. Average Japanese children get their own room at about nine or ten years of age. In Japan, till the separations come, it said to be preferable for the family members to sleep in the same room together. In Japan, there is a verbal expression, "kawa no jin ni neru" (川の字に寝る), which means "sleep together in the form of the letter of river 『川』," that is to say "sleep sneaking up to each other that symbolizes the harmony of the family." According to D.W. Winnicott (1971), transitional objects are substitutes of mother when mother is absent, but in Japan mother is said to be present. A research found that American mothers talked more to the child and spent more time actively encouraging the infant to respond than did Japanese mothers, while Japanese mothers were more involved in rocking, carrying, and "lulling the infant." Another research shows that American mothers responded to infant behaviors primarily with facial and vocal displays, while Japanese mothers were more likely to respond with touch and other nonverbal behaviors. Furthermore, other research found that average usage of babyltalks of Japanese mothers is more frequent than American mothers (Fernand, A. & Morinaga, H.; 1993) (Fig. 9, 10). And also Japanese mothers were more likely than American mothers to engage their infants in empathy routines, encouraging the infant to show positive feelings toward a toy. In their relationship with the infant, Japanese mothers encourage "amae (甘え)," roughly translated as mutual dependence, while Americans place more value on fostering independence in their children. This also means in Japan parents wants to think their children to be their babies as long as possible. Maybe there is an essential socio-cultural factor in Japanese society to insist that the harmonious way of living is the most important thing. Children are not recommended by parents to be fully independent of and to have their feelings and thinking of their own. Instead, parents and adults foster the harmonious way of obeying to parents and adults in a considerable portion in children who must suppress their "hon-ne(real feelings and thinking)" in a deep layer of mind. So on the contrary, inharmonious way of living like self-assertive way is detested by leaders of Japanese societies who use a Japanese proverb "The nail that sticks out will get a pounding (出る杭は打たれる)." Those who stand out are likely to arouse opposition. In the public situation such as classes at school, best skillful way of getting along with teachers and friends is not to attract their attention too much beyond a necessity. This is why Japanese students hardly express their opinions unless teachers demand them to do so.

Let's go back to the children's development again. In elementary schools, though children is busy and have not much time to play compared to other countries, they play many games. They play hide-and-seek, "jintori (陣取り)" [a children's game in which both sides try to occupy each other's home base], "kick base (キックベース)" [a children's game in which not using bats and gloves they kick a socc-
er ball in the rules of baseball game], “gomu-tobi (ゴム跳び, girls)” [a children’s play in which two person stand as poles and stretch an elastic string from pole to pole and other members jump or hop or catch a string with their legs skillfully], etc.

But in Japan, children play video games enthusiastically and parents or adults dispute each other over them. Main negative opinions are that contents are too much aggressive, that children can not stop it by themselves and play them more than three hours if parent doesn’t stop it, that too much playing causes poor eyesight, that the games have withdrawal symptoms like drugs, etc. But nowadays, almost every child more or less plays video games. It amounts to one big subculture socially and economically, and not only children but also adolescents and even adults are included in that subculture. It can be said that the video games have a role of a tool of communication, but also can be said that they deprive children of a communication skills and they make children’s interpersonal relationships heartless.

Another worrisome thing is that ironically cramming schools are becoming main fields of social contact of children. According to recent research, children who go to cramming schools have less anxiety than children who don’t go there. This partly means that children who go to cramming schools study enough to decrease an anxiety. But in the competitive society like cramming schools, as teachers also win out over their competitors on the votes of children, teachers are good at teaching and entertain children more than public schools. And moreover, some children make friends at the cramming schools and live happily there. So although school refusal children refuse to go to public school, it is strange but some of them can go to cramming schools.

In Japan, students who win out over many competitors to get in to the university they aspired become completely disgusted with studies and lessons and try to recover the lost time, they use their time for playings, sports clubs and hobbies. University students of Japan is said to be students who do the least study in the world. For average students, university is a place of relaxation between the busy high school and busy company.

So far, I have discussed the socio-cultural factors in Japan and briefly explained the psychological development of children in relation to the society and their parents. To emphasize the matter, I exaggerate the factors and overstate differences between Japan and Western countries. As it is usual with other countries, Japan has been also experiencing a Westernization and changing slowly. Recent Japanese men and women asserts themselves rather clearly compared to people in the old days. Some men and women ceased from burying themselves in the vertical society and running the risk of being regarded as egoist they begin to stand on their own feet. But on the contrary, they are liable to lose positive sides of Japanese culture.

Maybe through the international cultural exchanges, not just copying the Western way, Japanese people need to understand both the negative and positive sides of their own socio-cultural factors and find out a new way of living and interacting to adjust to the world-wide change into 21 century. In such a way, the international cultural exchanges are needed in each countries to recomprened their culture from many angles and to change their way of life leaving the positive side of it to make a new world of linking.

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